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SUBLIME PESSIMISM

OF

Omar Khayâm,

THE ASTRONOMER-POET OF PERSIA,

BY


B. B. NAGARKAR.



*I expect to pass through this world but once. If,
therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good
thing I can do to any fellow-Human Being, let me do
it NOW : for, I shall not pass this way again.*



Price—As. 8. .




Whoever hesitates to utter that which he thinks the highest truth, lest it should be too much in advance of the time, may re-assure himself by looking at his acts from an impersonal point of view. He must remember always that while he is a descendant of the past, he is a parent of the future. His thoughts are as children born to him, which he may not carelessly let die.

* * * * *

Not as adventitious, therefore, will the wise man regard the faith which is in him. The highest truth he sees he will fearlessly utter, knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world—knowing that if he can effect the change he aims at—well : if not, well also, though not so well.

HERBERT SPENCER.



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To
The Hon. Justice Badrudin Tyabji,

OF THE BOMBAY HIGH COURT,

WHO IS HELD

IN JUST REGARD AND HIGH ESTEEM

BY

EVERY COMMUNITY

IN THIS

First City in India,

IS

DEDICATED

(With Permission)

THIS HUMBLE ESSAY

BY THE AUTHOR.



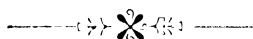
INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY

THE REV. R. SCOTT M. A.,

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BOMBAY.



The poetry of Omar Khayâm was destined to undergo a sort of re-birth in England in the Nineteenth Century ; and during the last generation it has been studied and treasured by an admiring school in that far Western land. If it has found appreciation in Europe, much more may we expect to see it studied in India, where life and thought are so much nearer to what they were in the land and age in which Omar Khayâm appeared. And, therefore, a volume of competent introduction should be gladly welcomed.



INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

I do not suppose that the poetry of Omar Khayâm is either of the very highest kind in point of imagination or the healthiest in its interpretation of life. But it is fresh, thoughtful, suggestive and often beautiful, in a high degree. A full and correct appreciation of it can be made only in the light of a knowledge of historical development; of what has been called the "time-spirit," and of the political and social circumstances then prevailing. To the student of literature every type of poetry, the didactic no less than the creative, is interesting and instructive; for it reveals an aspect of the onward march of mind and presents an image of a human soul struggling in the foremost ranks.

There is still another recommendation. Fitzgerald's translation is entitled to this praise that, like Tennyson's "In Memoriam," it has virtually established as a classical English form a notable semi-lyrical stanza hitherto rarely employed.

Mr. Nagarkar is well fitted, by sympathetic study, by extensive reading, and by wide experience of varieties of thought, to be the expositor of this Oriental sage. His little book is admirably prepared and printed, and I trust it will have a large circulation.



PREFACE.



WHAT student of English literature is there who is not acquainted, even if not familiar, with that exquisite rendering into English of the *Rubâyat* of Omar Khayâm by the Irish poet, Edward Fitzgerald? Years ago, when I was in College, I came across a copy of this translation, and it at once captivated my fancy. At first it was purely its literary beauty that fascinated me, but very soon its philosophy began to grow on me; so that at the end of the first perusal, I felt that I was greatly interested in the sentiments expressed, in the little book. Just at that time I was passing through an agnostic frame of mind, and many of the ideas expressed in the poem found a ready response in the beliefs of my heart. Time has changed my religious views: experience in the hard school of life, and serious pondering over the deep problems of "*here*" and "*here-after*" have radically altered my mental and intellectual attitude towards the great questionings that at times must come to every seriously disposed individual. But through all these changes of mind and heart,

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my love and admiration for the Rubâyat have remained all unchanged and unaltered. My interest in the Rubâyat has been chiefly literary and speculative: but it has been very deep and tender—and, if possible, even abiding.

A few years ago, when I happened to be in England, I came across one or two admirers of Omar Khayâm; and I was very much struck with the deep impression that the Persian Poet in his English garb, that is, such as Fitzgerald had clothed him in, had made on their minds. In one of their clubs they invited me to give an informal “talk” on this Eastern poet, and I accepted the invitation. I spoke only very briefly giving them some of my early impressions of the poetry of Omar. Very soon I came to find out—and that to my intense surprise—that Omar had quite a large circle of warm admirers in that cold and distant land. From England I went to America; and there also I realized that Omar was deeply loved and greatly cherished among the literary classes of the United States. I had occasion to speak on Omar Khayâm before several of the leading literary clubs in the United States.

In February 1898, I gave an address on the poetry and philosophy of Omar Khayâm, before the Indian National Association in London, when Sir Alfred Lyall was in the chair. A fresh trans-

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lation of the Rubâyat had been published just about that time; and, consequently, Omar was much talked about and discussed in the literary circles of the British Metropolis. My address coming on at such a juncture of time, the meeting was very largely attended and the audience was an influential one. The views that I expressed before this meeting are all incorporated in the present booklet.

Among the speakers that took part in the discussion that followed my address was Moulvi M. Barkatullah. What he said on the occasion was extremely interesting as it throws some light on the circumstances that created the poetry of Omar. I cannot resist the temptation of making the following extract from his very thoughtful speech :—

“Omar Khayâm was the product of the philosophic age and circumstances created by the Abbasside Caliphs of Bagdad in the mediæval times. On the one hand, the cult of Sufism established by the Prophet through Ali—the door of the spiritual knowledge, of which the Prophet was the tower—was then prevalent in Muslim countries. On the other hand, the treasures of wisdom belonging to ancient Greece and India were brought to Bagdad, the then centre of the civilised world; and the two streams of the Eastern and Western philosophies found a confluence on the banks of

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the Tigris. The collision of the Oriental and the Occidental speculative systems produced a great confusion of thought which resulted in widespread scepticism. To avert this danger, there arose a new school of thought, which goes by the name of the Mutakallemeen. The name Mutakallemeen signifies *the believers in the Logos*—for *Kalam* in Arabic denotes just what *Logos* does in Greek. The Sufis, as well as the Mutakallemeen taught that the *Logos* (the Intelligent Absolute) was the source of all things, from which they come and to which they returned. Both the Schools established a system of Cosmodicy, which aims at the reconciliation of the phenomena of Nature with the canons of universal ethics, the difference between the two only being this much—that the former taught philosophy in the guise of religion and ethics, while the latter taught religion and ethics in the form of philosophy. Pessimism undoubtedly pervades the teaching of the Sufis, because they, like Gautama Buddha, believe that beneath the shifting series of phenomena there exists a permanent reality; nay, the Absolute alone *is*, and all else is *mâyâ* (illusion). Omar Khayâm, imbued with these ideas, like many other great philosophers of the age, rendered a great service to humanity through his poems, by checking the spirit of militarism and struggle for supremacy, so common in those days, and stirred up by the influence of epic poems like those of

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Firdusi and others. To many a layman some of his expressions may appear even bordering on indecency ; for example, his devotion to the *Sâki* (the cup bearer) and his love of wine. But one acquainted with Sufi literature knows well that the first term stands for the Muse, which Socrates often used to invoke at the moment of introducing a difficult subject, and the second term for the inspiration of the Muse."

The charge has often been made, and mostly by the detractors of Omar Khayâm, that Fitzgerald's English translation of the *Rubâyat* is "in no sense a translation", inasmuch as it is *not literal* ! The only answer that one can make to such criticism is that no great poet can ever be translated from one language into another literally and word by word. Such a close and servile rendering would fail to convey to the reader the sense and sentiments of the original, much less can it ever impart to him the spirit and depth of the original author. The purely elementary learner, whose one anxiety is to master the idiom and the linguistic twists and turns of the original language, may find such a translation of rare service to him—nay it may in a sense be indispensable to him. But to the student of thoughts and ideas such a translation would be *no* translation at all : it will be a mere transliteration. Fitzgerald's rendering of the *Rubâyat* is not meant for mere learners of the

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former class. His main aim—and perhaps the only aim—is to transfuse the thoughts and ideas of Omar from their original Persian into the English language. From this point of view, even the most captious critic of the *Rubâyat* in its English garb must admit that Fitzgerald has had no equal in the past, and one may safely venture to say that he will have none in the future.

Judging from the merits of their English renderings I venture to say that Fitzgerald's English *Rubâyat* is far more living and life-like than Alexander Pope's coldly mechanical English versification of Homer's Greek *Iliad*. To be able to translate any great author, especially an inspired poet, from one language into another, the translator must be soaked in and saturated with the most intimate thoughts and beliefs of the original author. Whatever may be their respective outer environments of society and civilization, of the accidents of time and country, both must be possessed of the same mind. Each must be a reflex image of the other. In this sense Fitzgerald was Omar Khayâm born in modern Great Britain, and Omar Khayâm was the Irish Fitzgerald living—perhaps in one of his former incarnations—in ancient Persia. No one, therefore, was better fitted than the Irish Poet to interpret the old ancient Persian Poet-Philosopher to the modern people who understood the English tongue.

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There are those again with whom it has become a fashion to set down all admiration for the poetry and philosophy of Omar Khayâm as a mere *fad*. Nothing can be a greater and a more pernicious *fad* than this fashion of attempting to belittle a great name. The very fact that Omar Khayâm has lived so long, and evoked the loving admiration of so many thousands of thoughtful people separated from him by centuries of years and by cycles and epi-cycles of religious and social sentiments, is a sufficient evidence of his undying vitality and of something there is in him that appeals to individuals of every nation and nationality who have learnt to ask themselves the two supreme categorical questions of “*why*” and “*wherefore*.” Omar Khayâm thought out for himself the great questions of “*whence*” and “*whither*,” “*why*” and “*wherefore*”; and he arrived at certain conclusions. And though these are of a very desponding nature, one need not despair of the activity of the human mind. On the contrary, we should rejoice that there are those who do not neglect to exercise the supreme prerogative of man—*viz.*, that of using the faculty of reason. And if after a legitimate use of this prerogative they should arrive at conclusions far different from our own, instead of disliking and despising them, we should feel nothing but pity and sympathy for them, just as we would for those who have been led astray.

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I am not a pessimist, though I have given expression to my views on the "Sublime Pessimism" of Omar Khayâm. To me it appears that one must have in himself a superabundance of optimism before he can appreciate the truth that there may be in pessimism. It is by the study of views and beliefs contrary and opposed to our own that we get a proper perspective of our own beliefs and learn their truth or untruth. One need not, therefore, rail at pessimism.

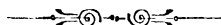
It is only fair that I should mention here that much of what I have said in the earlier part of the present booklet, concerning Omar's early life and Fitzgerald's earlier editions of the *Rubâyat*, has been gathered from various sources; and in many places I have given the very language of the authors whom I have consulted.

The substance of this little book was given in the form of a lecture before several audiences in this country also—at Lahore, Bombay, Poona and other towns. Wherever it was given it was received with deep appreciation, and a desire was expressed that it should be enlarged and published in a permanent form. The present book is sent out in response to that desire. I leave it to the discerning public to judge of the merits or otherwise of my humble efforts.

BOMBAY: GRANT ROAD, } B. B. NAGARKAR.
17th November, 1903. }



SUBLIME PESSIMISM
OF
OMAR KHAYÂM,
THE ASTRONOMER-POET OF PERSIA.



OMAR KHAYÂM, the Astronomer-Poet of Persia, was born at Naishâpur in Khorrâsan, some time in the latter part of the 11th century of the Christian era. He died in the year 1123 A. D. Not much is known of the early life of Omar, and very little is on record of the advanced years of this inspired poet of Persia. A most interesting story is related of the student days of Omar. At Naishâpur there lived a great and wise teacher named Imâm Mowâffak. Throughout the whole of Khorrâsan, he was greatly honoured and highly respected as a saintly teacher. His illustrious years exceeded eighty-five, and hundreds of pupils had received instruction from him. The popular belief was that every boy who read the Korân, or studied the sacred traditions at his feet would assuredly attain to honour and happiness.



Now, at one time there were three yôuths studying under this renowned doctor. Their names were Ni-zâm-ul-Mulk, Hassan Ben Sabbah, and Hakim Omar Khayâm. These three formed a close friendship; and, as one evening after their lessons, they sat together talking on general matters, all of a sudden Hassan got up and addressing the other two said :—"It is a universal belief that the pupils of Imâm Mowâffak, our revered preceptor, will attain to fortune. Now, if we all do not attain thereto, without doubt one of us will. What then shall be our mutual pledge and bond?" The two who were listening with wonder and attention said :—"Be it what you please." Whereupon, Hassan said—"Well, let us make a vow that to whomsoever this fortune falls, he shall share it equally with the rest, and reserve no pre-eminence for himself." The other two complied with this suggestion; and so between those three the compact was sealed. Years rolled on; the three young men finished their studies, and each one went his own way in the wide world. Nizâm-ul-Mulk, the first, who has recorded this story in his memoirs, says that from Khorrâsan he went to Transoxiana, and thence wandered to Ghazni and Cabul. On his return, fortune smiled upon him, until at last he rose to be the grand Vazir or administrator of affairs during the Sultanate of Sultân Alp Arslân. Years passed by, after which his old school-compa-

nions found him, and, in accordance with the compact of their youthful days, demanded a share in his good fortune. The Vazir also was generous and kept his word.

Hassan was the first to come forward. He demanded a high post in the Government ; and at the recommendation of his Vazir, the Sultân gave him a post of high honour. But later on Hassan being dissatisfied with his slow and gradual rise began to plot and conspire against his friend and benefactor, the Vazir ; until at last he rose in open rebellion and murdered Nizâm-ul-Mulk, his school-boy friend.

Omar Khayâm also came to the Vazir ; but unlike Hassan, he cared not for title or office. "The greatest boon you can confer on me," said Omar, "is to let me live in a corner under the shadow of your fortune, to spread wide the advantages of science, and pray for your long life and prosperity." The Vazir tells us that, when he found that Omar was really sincere in his modesty, he pressed him no further, but granted him a yearly pension of 1200 *mithkâls* of gold from the treasury of Naishâpur.

Thus at Naishâpur lived and died, in comparative retirement, Omar Khayâm, the great poet and philosopher of Irân. It is noteworthy that *Khayâm*, the *takhâlus* (surname) of Omar, in the original Persian means a "tent-maker." So that, it would

appear that either the ancestors of Omar had been *tent-makers*, or in the early part of his life he himself must have lived by making tents.

Similarly many Persian poets derive their names from their occupations. Thus we have Attâr, which means "a druggist," and Assâr, which means an "oil presser." Most of these, like the English *Smiths*, *Archers*, *Millers*, *Flechers*, etc., simply retain the *surname* of a hereditary calling. Omar himself alludes to his name *Khayâm* in the following whimsical lines :—

" Khayâm, who stitched the tents of science,
Has fallen in grief's furnace and been suddenly burned ;
The shears of Fate have cut the tent ropes of his life,
And the broker of Hope has sold him for nothing ! "

Omar was a devoted lover of science; but he was passionately fond of astronomy. His researches in that branch of knowledge obtained for him universal praise ; and Malik Shah, the son and successor of Alp Arslân, showered great favours upon him. When Malik Shah determined to reform the Calendar, Omar was one of the eight learned men employed to do it. The result was the *Jalâli* era (so-called from *Jalâl-ud-din*, one of the names of King Malik Shah)—"a computation of time," says Gibbon, "which surpasses the Julian, and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style. He was also the author of some of the astronomical tables entitled *Zijî-Malik Shâhi*. So also an Arabic treatise of his on

Algebra has been translated into French by a noted French mathematician.

But Omar was not only an astronomer ; he was also a poet and a philosopher. He was decidedly a greater poet than a man of science. Omar's poetical genius was of a peculiarly high order. He seems to have grappled with the great problems of life and death, God and immortality, this world and the next; and, being by nature of a free and unconventional turn of mind, on all the above questions he arrived at conclusions that were openly at war with those accepted opinions that passed as current coin in the religious world of his own times. Having a strong pessimistic vein somewhere in his temperament, he soon came at first to doubt, and then almost to disbelieve the Providence of God. In the guidance of man's life he saw more of dark destiny and iron fate than any kind and beneficent leading of Providence. Hence, quite naturally, he thought more of this world than of the next, more of to-day than of to-morrow ! In brief, the trend of his thoughts ran counter to the recognised Mahomedan religious beliefs : and this one single circumstance is enough to explain why Omar's name is so studiously ignored in the Persian literature, while those of Hâfiz and Firdusi are mentioned so often and so honourably.

The difference between Omar on the one hand, and Hâfiz and Firdusi on the other is that while

the two latter wrote under a strong odour of orthodox Islâmism, Omar was always honest of heart and head. He hated mysticism, and did not care to hide his true thoughts under the cloak of recognised Mahomedanism. Most of the Persian poets, including Hâfiz, and with the single exception, perhaps, of Firdusi, borrowed largely from the material of Omar; but they were politic enough to turn it to a mystical use more convenient to themselves and the people they addressed. Each made his *salâm* to Mahomed at the beginning and end of his song, and thus escaped the odium of being stigmatised as a heretic. But Omar was honest with himself, as he wished that every one should be the same with him. He could not disguise his convictions in Sufistic sophistry. He sang freely and without any reserve, on such themes as God, this world and the next, free will, fatalism and necessity, with the result that his own people began to look askance at him with doubt and suspicion.

Critics of Omar have often compared him with Lucretius, the Roman poet and philosopher, who died about 52 B. C. Others again have called him the Voltaire of Persia. Like both these, Omar Khayâm was a person of subtle, strong, and cultivated intellect, and fine imagination. Like them too he had an indomitable passion for truth and justice; and like each of them, he justly revolted from his country's false religion, and

false or foolish devotion to it. It is believed by many that Omar's life and utterances went a great way in broadening and liberalising the ideas and opinions of Akbar, the great Mogul Emperor. This, however, is only a surmise, and must be taken as such.

We may not agree—and certainly I do not—with every position that Omar takes on the sacred and solemn problems of life and death; but no one who has carefully perused his poems can help admitting that Omar delivers himself upon each of these momentous problems with a power and force that are as singular for their depth and originality as they are remarkable for their sweep and grasp. But religious fanaticism and priestly prejudice are always and everywhere strong enough to suppress—though only for a time—true genius and sterling honesty. Hence, it was that while the writings of other Persian poets had been long before translated into several European languages, the *Rubâyat* of Omar Khayâm was held back in Irânic obscurity for over seven centuries.

It was reserved for an Irishman, named Edward Fitzgerald, to bring before the Western world this matchless gem of a Persian poem, the *Rubâyat* of Omar Khayâm. His English rendering of the Persian poem is pronounced to be as perfect as it can be. Reliable authorities have given it as their opinion that Fitzgerald's translation of the *Rubâyat* is not only "close and exact"

but that it is a "marvellous feat of poetical transfusion." Quite recently a new translation has been brought out by Mr. Richard Le Gallienne. But undoubtedly it falls far short of the merits that Fitzgerald's version possesses. There can be no comparison between the two. To every true lover of poetry, Gallienne's newly published version must strike as being quite tame and flat. Speaking of Fitzgerald's translation an able critic has said that the Irish poet "by the magic of his genius has successfully transplanted into the garden of English poesy exotics that bloom like native flowers." So also no less a poet than the late Tennyson wrote that he knew of no version done in English more "divinely well" than Fitzgerald's translation.

It might be interesting for us to know that the first edition of this English translation was published in 1858. It bore the name of the publisher, but not that of the translator. Naturally it was a complete failure; and Mr. Fitzgerald was disappointed, not so much for his own as for the publisher's sake. This first edition consisted only of two hundred copies, and even these could not be disposed of until the price had been brought down from *five* shillings to *one penny*, and the publication had been put up for sale along with cheap books! We are told that among the first few buyers were Dante, Gabriel Rossette, Mr. Swinburne, Sir Richard Burton, and others. The

literary influence of these high personages soon brought the volume of the poems to the favourable notice of an appreciative public ; and very soon there was a demand for a second edition, which was brought out by the same publisher in 1868. This time Mr. Fitzgerald had introduced several additions and made several changes, by means of which the number of stanzas was considerably increased beyond the original seventy-five. Very soon the volume became popular with the reading public ; and somehow this popularity crossed the Atlantic and caught the American mind. The literary magnates of America grew quite enthusiastic over it, and hundreds of copies were exhausted in the select circles of the cultured classes of America. Both in England and America the popularity of the Rubâyat came to be so overpowering that the Omar-cult grew to be a kind of Freemasonry ! Whenever two persons who loved and admired the Rubâyat happened to come together, even by chance, they became fast friends. A third edition was brought out in 1872 with further alterations, and a fourth one in 1879. This last one is the final ; and the quotations that I shall be giving are all from this final edition.

This is not the occasion to enter into the life of the translator. I shall only add that Edward Fitzgerald quietly passed away in 1883, in the 75th year of his age. He wrote several other

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poems, all of which are exquisitely finished and altogether of a high order, but the Rubâyat will always stand as an immortal memorial of his poetical genius.

With this brief introduction let us now turn to the thought and philosophy of Omar Khayâm, as he has depicted it in the Rubâyat.

A careful reader and observer of current literature in these days is constantly reminded that "there is nothing new under the sun." Scarcely do we find some rare gem of thought or expression, when all of a sudden, we discover that it is only a diamond, polished anew, perhaps, and spread out as an original stone. Neither the reader nor the writer is always aware that the gem is antique, and the setting alone is new. The rich mine where the treasure was first found had been worked but a few years, after which it had come to be looked upon as full of dirt and dust; but the gem, polished and worn by time and use ever sparkles and shines regardless of the fact that the miner's name is forgotten and his work alone remains. Thus Nature, the great communist, provides that the treasure of genius, like her own beautiful gifts of sunshine, air, and rain, shall remain the common property of all her children while any dwell upon this earth. Current philosophy and literature seems to point to the ascendancy of what is often termed the "pessimistic

school" of thought. In one sense this philosophy uncrowns man and places him in his proper relation to the great universe of which he is so small a part; but while it makes less of man, it expects less from him and covers his deeds with that cloak of charity which is the legitimate garment of the weak and imperfect handiwork of the Great Unknown. But these modern reflections on life and its problems, its purposes and lessons, are far from being new. Without venturing any surmise as to their age or origin, we open that old Persian pearl, the *Rubâyat*, and find on its musty pages the great thoughts and the searching questions which have ever returned to man since his intellect was born, and which will still remain unanswered when the last word shall have been spoken and the race have run its course.

It is nearly 800 years since Omar Khayâm, the Persian astronomer, philosopher and poet, mused and wrote upon the uncertainty of life, the eternity of time, and the mutability of human things. Since the rose-bush was planted on his grave, the material world has been made almost new. Art and literature have given countless treasures to the earth, and science has solved its riddles without end; but the mysteries of existence, the problems of life, the deep heart of the universe, the cause and purpose and end of all, are mysteries as dark, and deep and despairing as they were

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eight centuries ago—or even eighteen centuries ago! To quote from the pages of the *Rubâyat* :—

There was the Door to which I found no Key ;
There was the Veil through which I could not see :
Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee
There was—and then no more of Thee and Me.

Like a newly-discovered tract of land, this old book burnished by the genius of Fitzgerald, comes to us as the last and the profoundest word upon the infinite mysteries which overshadow human life. It seems to be the last word rather than one of the first, spoken to the perplexed soul of man, calling him away from the vain pursuit of vanities, and asking what all of it is about. To an egotistic age, and to a people who are unduly puffed up by the commanding position that fortune has allotted to them among the many nations of the world, this message coming from one of the most ancient of nations, reminds us that all wisdom is neither gathered now nor here. The Persian pearl dug from Omar Khayâm's brain, remained unpolished for more than 700 years. It was left for Edward Fitzgerald to carefully and patiently burnish up the gem and to make it the thing of beauty that we know. It may be that research and study would reveal much of the personal traits and private life of this great Persian philosopher whose fame has so outlived his clay; but with these we can have no concern. It is not

important for us to know his parents, or whether he had a wife and children, or cattle and lands. All of these, if he had any, are gone, and only his work remains. True we cannot but reflect on the personality of the poet in whose brain these great thoughts were born ; but we can only know the man by knowing his works. Some there are who stand at a distance and view the acts of the imperfect beings, who at the best stumble and grope along the uncertain path between the cradle and the grave. All the foot-steps that are straight and true pass unnoticed in their view ; but the irregular, uncertain, shifting tracks stand out alone to mark the character of the pilgrim who bore the heavy load in the best possible way he could. These forget that every son of man travels an un-beaten path—a road beset with dangers and temptations that no other wanderer met ; that his foot-steps can only be judged in the full knowledge of the strength and light he had, the burden that he carried, the obstacles and temptations that he met, and a thorough acquaintance with the open and secret motive that impelled him here or there. That Omar's steps were often winding and devious, and like those of all other mortal men, we gather from his words. No doubt his kind neighbours and dearest friends delighted in gossiping about the great philosopher ; and his character was often ruined in the coteries of select friends and in the sacred precincts of Church societies—or even in the private parties of puritanical pietists—

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I mean such as those as the ancient Persians had among them : for, let us remember that these in old Persia had no more integrity and conscience than the scandle-monger of to-day ! These buzzards have been long forgotten. They could not live upon the great name they tarnished ; and we would not even know that he was their prey except for lines like these :—

Indeed ! The Idols I have loved so long
Have done my Credit in this world much Wrong :
Have drowned my Glory in a shallow Cup,
And sold my Reputation for a Song !

Eight hundred years ago, as to-day, the love of wine was one of the chief weaknesses of the flesh. Probably the ancient Persians had their “ Anju-man Islâm Temperance League,” if not a “ Total Abstainers’ Association,” but the love of the grape has outlasted these ancient organisations, as it threatens to outlive all the modern ones in turn. Doubtless the frailties of human nature are substantially of the same kind as in the days of old. For, while man may change the fashion of his garment or religion, nature is ever consistent and persistent, and is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. But our human philosopher, like our modern men, saw the folly of his ways, and made many a brave resolve, no doubt, on the first day of the calendar year, or upon the recurring of the anniversary of his birth : and these good intentions and solemn purposes melted

OMAR KHAYÂM.

in the sun-shine then the same as now ! The following lines might have been written the day after our last birth-day, as well as in the days of Omar :—

Indeed, indeed, Repentance oft before
I swore—but was I sober when I swore ?
And then and then came Spring, and Rose-in-hand
My thread-bare Penitence apieces tore !

But Omar was larger in heart than most of the weak and sinning children of to-day—his own frailties taught him the great rare lesson, that of all the virtues charity is the chiefest. It is a sad fact that no one persists in throwing stones at others as the occupants of glass-houses ; and strangest of all, they ever persist in stoning the same particular kind of a house as the one in which they live ! But Omar Khayâm measured others with that charity with which he wished in turn to have his conduct judged : and as we read the wondrous product of his mind, and thus understand the thought that stirred his being, we can know the man better than did his neighbours, who measured a great soul by the narrow standard of their own sordid minds. We know that his purpose was lofty ; and above all the mists and conflicting emotions of his life, he rose majestic and supreme, unsullied by the specks and spots which can only mar the weak and the feeble.

Let us turn then to the philosophy and poetry of this great soul to know the man ; and as figs

are not gathered of thistles, we may be sure that broad thoughts, high aspirations, and tender charity are born only of great minds and noble souls. To Omar Khayâm the so-called sins of men were not crimes for which they should be judged, but weaknesses inherent in their very being, and beyond their power to prevent or overcome. He knew that man could not separate himself from all the rest of nature ; and that the rules and conditions of his being were as fixed and absolute as the revolutions of the planets and the changing seasons of the year.

We might say that Omar was a fatalist. Above man and his works, he saw the heavy hand of destiny ever guiding and controlling, ever moving its creatures forward to the inevitable fate that all the previous centuries had placed in store for the helpless captive, marching shackled to the block ! For, there have been two views of life : both philosophies have been made by man and mostly for him. One places him above all the rest of the universe, whose infinite mysteries are constantly revolving and changing before his hazy wondering gaze. The portion of the world that comes nearest to his eyes, he cannot understand ; and his own existence is a mystery that all the ages have not solved, beyond its unbounded space whose darkness is scarcely pierced by the countless twinkling worlds far larger than our own ; and beyond

there to infinity is what—no one can ever think or even guess! And yet, amidst it all, one system teaches that man rules supreme, and that the fate of all the worlds, or of all that may exist thereon, has no relation to his own. Others peer into the thick darkness that hangs above it all, and can see no light: they do not understand, and will not guess. The endless mysteries are not for them to solve; they feel themselves a part of the mighty whole, and are powerless to separate their lives from all the rest; and would not dare undertake it even if they could. They know that in the great unlimited universe, they are less than the tiniest bubble in the wildest and angriest sea. That in the words of the Rubâyat:—

We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with this Sun-illumin'd Lantern, held
In Midnight by the Master of the Show

Omar Khayâm was not the first—as certainly he was not the last—to feel the impotence of man under the influence of the Great Power which animates the whole. Oppressed with this crushing sense of the utter helplessness of man, he refused to believe in the accountability of man to his Maker. He seemed to realise that back of all the universe, some Intelligent Power moved and controlled the world for some purpose unknown to

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all except to the Seat of the Controlling Power; but that man was in any way accountable for the whole, he did not believe. To him, the Great Master sent us hither or thither to suit His will; and it was only left for us to obey His mighty power. As Omar beautifully expresses it, the individual units of humanity are:—

But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days:
Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays.

Perhaps, the egotism of the ordinary man, if nothing higher, will always keep him from placing the acts of human beings upon the same level as those of inanimate clay; but our poet could face the facts and follow his philosophy to its end. He made no distinction in cases where he saw no difference. The following stanza shows what he thought of man's much valued power to choose and act—what in the technical language of theology is termed the principle of free-will:—

The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But here or there, as strikes the Player, goes;
And He that tossed you down into the field,
He knows about it all—He knows—He knows.

Even this does not sufficiently express his thoughts of man's absolute irresponsibility for his acts. We have all met the parallel drawn

between man and the pottery fashioned by the moulder from the clay. Perhaps, there is no better illustration of the helplessness of the human being in the hands of the Power which fashioned and shaped him, even ages before his birth, the uncontrollable force which determined the length of his body, the colour of his hair, the size and shape of his brain, and the contour of his face. But the comparison made in the beautiful stanza wrought by Omar, and re-touched and gilded by the magic of Fitzgerald is wondrously powerful and fine. The poet ranges his poor pieces of pottery in a line, each piece representing a man. These poor imperfect vessels fresh from the hand of the potter plead their cause and excuse their faults. In this congress of the pots we find the following rare philosophy :—

*
After a momentary silence spake
Some Vessel of a more ungainly make ;
“ They sneer at me for leaning all awry :
What ! did the Hand then of the Potter shake ? ”

When will humanity be great enough and good enough to distinguish between the innate faults of man and faults arising out of the limitations of his environment and the results of his heredity ! When can it look over the myriads of human beings, each with his flaws and limitations, and pity instead of blame !

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The history of the past is a record of man's cruel inhumanity to man ; of one imperfect vessel accusing and shattering another for the faults of both. In ancient times and among savage tribes, the old, the infirm, and the diseased were led out and put to death ; even later, the maniac and the imbecile were fettered, chained, beaten, and imprisoned, because they were different from other men. We have learnt to build asylums and treat them with tenderness and care, except upon rare occasions when they kill some eminent citizen, when an insane society kills them in turn. We have learnt not to blame the dwarf for his stature, the haunch-back for the load on his back, the deaf and the blind, because they cannot hear nor see. We do not expect the midget to carry the giant's load, or the cripple to triumph in a contest of speed. We establish a regulation size for policemen and soldiers, and we do not put a man to death because his stature is below the standard fixed. We forgive the size of the foot, the length of the arm, the shade of the hair, the colour of the eye, and even the form of the skull ! But while we do not blame a man, because he has an ill-shaped head, we punish him because the brain within conforms to the skull which holds it in its place !

The world has made guns and swords, racks and dungeons, chains and whips, blocks and

gibbets ; and to these has been dragged an endless procession, through all the ages past. It has penned and maimed, and tortured and killed, because the potter's work was imperfect and the clay was weak ! During all these long ages it has punished mental deformity as a crime, and without pity or regret has crushed the imperfect vessels beneath its feet. Every jail, every scaffold, every victim is a monument to its cruelty, and blind unreasoning wrath ! Whether it was a fire kindled to burn a heretic in Geneva, or a gibbet erected to kill a witch in London or Edinburgh, or a scaffold made for a lunatic in Bombay or Calcutta, it has ever been the same—the punishment of the creatures for faults arising out of circumstances over which they had no control.

Let us take a few typical cases. A child born of parents not known to be of high morals grows in the midst of criminal associations, and is brought up with the roughs and the ragamuffins of the streets, with the inevitable consequence that one day, when it grows to be a full-grown man, he is caught in a highway robbery or a dastardly murder. The result is that this human being born and brought up in the midst of crime is sent out for transportation for life, or sentenced to be hanged, and for no other fault than that he was born where he was ! Again, a man

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who is the head of a family, of a dear wife and darling children, comes under the stroke of "hard times," or is caught in the storm of an "Engineers' Strike," or is driven to despair in an Indian famine! He has seen his devoted wife die of hunger; and now he sees before his very eyes his little ones perishing of starvation! And just to save them from death he commits theft. How does society, civilised society in a country that brags and boasts of her civilisation in season and out of season, treat him? Why, they find him guilty of theft, and send him to a felon's jail—euphemistically called the "house of correction," but in reality the seat of perdition! Again, a young and inexperienced girl falls a helpless victim to the false pretences and insincere promises of a vile *brute*, falsely called *man*,—is driven to hide her shame by smothering every proof of her fall! Here again the judge and the jury both pronounce against her a verdict of child-murder and deal with her accordingly!

In most of such cases if we could only place ourselves in the critical situation of these so-called criminals and actually realise the moral warfare they had undergone, the temptations they had tried to overcome, the tremendous odds of adverse circumstances they had fought against, we would crown them as heroes, and not kill them as criminals.

But we live in the shadows, we can only see the causes and effects that are closest to our eyes. If the clouds would rise, and the sun shine bright, and our vision reach out into time and space, we might find that He who made these imperfect vessels judged them in a different spirit—a spirit of kindness and commiseration, and instead of sending them to eternal damnation, He sent them into other and higher environments, better calculated to develop their faculties of mind and heart.

The following stanzas are born of this philosophy, and would inevitably come from the broad and charitable brain that had studied the creeds that told of the cruelty of the Great Maker, but whose mind and conscience had not been stunted and warped by their palsying dogmas :—

Then said a Second—"Ne'er a porvish Boy
Would break the Bowl from which he drank in joy ;
And He that with His hand the Vessel made
Will surely not in after-wrath destroy."

"Why," said another, "Some there are who tell
Of one who threatens He will toss to Hell
The luckless Pots He marr'd in making—Fish !
He is a good Fellow, and 't will all be well."

"What ! from His helpless Creatures be repaid
Pure Gold for what He lent us dross allay'd—
Sue for a Debt we never did contract,
And cannot answer—Oh the sorry trade !

These are some of Omar Khayâm's views of the responsibilities of man; but we are here, and practical philosophy asks the question—"What does it mean, and how shall we take the journey we cannot avoid?" The poet, and the dreamer, and the copy-book have told us much of the meaning of life; we repeat these lessons often to make ourselves believe them to be true. When we feel a doubt casting its shadow across our path, we read them once again to drive the doubt away. And yet inspite of all this, we know absolutely nothing of the scheme, or whether there is any kind of plan. We are only whistlers passing through a grave-yard with our ears tied close and our eyes bandaged fast! It would surely be as well to step boldly up and read the inscription on the marble tomb, and then walk around and look at the vacant grinning space on the other side calmly waiting to record our own name!

In the philosophy of to-day, Omar Khayâm was a pessimist: he was not inclined to take a hopeful view of life or of hereafter. He would not look out into the midnight and swear that his eyes discerned a glorious rainbow, bright with fresh colours and unbounded hopes. All the proud promises, and brave assumptions, and false theories of the world were to him a mockery and a sham. The conceits and superstitions of religion and philosophy alike were hollow and

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bare. The jarring sects and quibbling theorists with their fine-spun webs were only worthy the attention of simple-minded folks. This is the way he put them down :—

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
About it and about : but evermore
Came out by the same door wherein I went.

In the ordinary meaning of the word, I say, Omar was a pessimist : but there is often a difference between the common interpretation and the one that is true. All men understand the uncertainties of life, the disappointments and troubles of existence, and the infinitesimal time that is, as it were, reluctantly parcelled out to each mortal from the eternity that had no beginning and will have no end ! The pessimist looks at all the hurry and rush, the torment and strife, the ambitions and disappointments that are the common lot of the people in general, and can see no prizes so tempting as rest and peace. So, he makes the most of what he has, and looks contentedly forward to the long sleep that brings relief at last.

Omar Khayâm was not deceived even for a moment by all the glitter and bustle of the world ; he saw the stage from behind the curtain, as well as from the circle before the scenes. He looked on the great surging mass of men, ever pulling and pushing, striving, and struggl-

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ing, working and fighting, as if all eternity was theirs in which to build, and all unmindful of the silent Book-Keeper who could be deceived by no false entries, and who ever remembered to demand his dues. Omar knew that :—

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusky Face,
Lighting a little hour or two—was gone!

Life to him was but :—

A Moment's Halt—a momentary taste
Of Being from the Well amid the Waste—
And Lo!—the phantom Caravan has reach'd
The Nothing it set out from—Oh, make haste!

'T is but a Tent where takes his one day's rest
A Sultân to the realm of Death address;
The Sultân rises, and the dark Ferrâsh
Strikes, and prepares it for another Guest.

In the presence of all that the world had to offer, while honours and glories fell fast upon his head, Omar still could not close his eyes to the facts of existence and to the mutability of human things. It may be that he mused too much upon the great Fact that ever sternly faces life, the Great Being before whom all monarchs unrobe, and in whose presence all crowns are shattered! To the boasting and

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the forgetful the following words may not be pleasant, but they are only too true:—

Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai
Whose Portals are Night and Day,
How Sultân after Sultân with his Pomp
Abode his destin'd Hour, and went his Way.

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep:
And Bahrâm, that great hunter—the Wild Ass
Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep.

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
Of the Two Worlds so wisely—they are thrust
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust!

Neither the great nor the good could avoid
the common fate; the unyielding Messenger
came to call the proud Sultân, and the good
and kindly friend.

•

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That from his Vintage rolling Time hath prest,
Have drunk a Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to rest.

Death is so common that we sometimes
wonder why men make plans: why they toil and
spin! Why do people work themselves even to
death, for the purpose of accumulating wealth
and property, when all of them have some day or
other to leave everything of this behind them!
But of course we can only see the leaves fall

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from other stalks. Only rarely do we feel that this can have a personal meaning, and that our turn must soon come! Omar looked at the stricken friends and thus mused:—

And we, that now make merry in the Room
They left, and Summer dresses in new Bloom ;
Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
Descend—ourselves to make a Couch—for whom ?
Whether at Naishâpur or Babylon,
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one !

It has never required the great or the learned to note the constant falling of the leaves and the ceaseless dropping of the sands. It is mainly from this fact that systems of religion have been evolved. Unhinged from all spiritual perception, man has ever sought to make himself believe that these things are not what they seem. It is only faith that has ever inspired him with the hope that in reality death is only a higher birth, and this material body but the prison for the soul. To the devout and spiritually-minded this is true: but the constant cry and the pleading of the ages has brought back no answering sound to prove that death is anything but death. The old philosopher could not accept any of these pleasing creeds, all of which he looked upon as so many delusive phantoms. He preferred to plant his feet on the shifting sands of doubt, rather than

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deceive himself by what to him were mere alluring and delusive hopes.

Upon the old question of immortality he could only answer what he knew; and this is what he said:—

Oh, threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise !
One thing at least is certain—*This* Life flies ;
One thing is certain and the rest is Lies ;
The Flower that once has blown forever dies !

Strange, is it not ? that of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too !

Why ! if the Soul can fling the Dust aside,
And naked on the Air of Heaven ride,
Wer't not a Shame—wer't not a Shame for him
In this clay carcass crippled to abide ?

These stanzas are decidedly gloomy and morbidly hopeless ; and not even for a moment can I be at one with the sentiments expressed in them. But for all this, I cannot but admit that they are thoughtful, brave and beautiful. We may seek to be children, if we will, but whatever our desires, we cannot strangle the questions that ever rise before our minds and refuse to let us dodge. To our own souls we must be just ; and true peace and comfort, when gained at a sacrifice of courage and integrity, cost too high a price. I do not mean to say that honest men and women cannot believe

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in the hope of immortality, much less that this hope is without any foundation in the instincts of human nature; but all the same it must be admitted that science and philosophy have left us many questionings without a ray of light. And the blackest midnight is more to be desired than blind unreasoning faith. Truth alone can make us free :—

And this I know: whether the True Light
Kindle to Love, or Wrath-consume me quite,
One Flash of Light within the Tavern caught,
Better than in the Temple lost outright.

Yes, one flash of the true light from above is better than all creeds and dogmas of any Church. It is better, even though these hold out the fairest prospects and brightest dreams, and the flash of true light be only the blackest midnight. Not only would Omar take away the hope of the 'commonly believed Paradise, but he leaves us little to boast of while we live upon earth. Our short obscure life is not noticed in this great sweep of time and the resistless march of events. Along the path-way of the world we scarcely leave a foot-print, and our loudest voice and bravest words are more completely lost than if spoken in the presence of Niagara's roar; and even the little that we have is as fading and transitory as the morning dew. This is the way Omar speaks of the brevity and impotence of one human life :—

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When You and I behind the Vêil are past,
Oh, but the long, long while the World shall last,
While of our Coming and Departure heeds
As the SEV'N SEAS should heed a pebble cast.

And fear not lest Existence closing your
Account, and mine, should know the like no more;
The Eternal Sâki from the Bowl has poured
Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour!

The weakness and littleness of man has been the subject of endless comments, both before and since; but never has a poet put it stronger than here. The Eternal Sâki, the Great Wine-Pourer, tips his pitcher and turns out millions of bubbles; and still they come forever, and each of us is one. But however brave and stoical Omar seems to be, still he feels sad when witnessing the flight of years and the ravages of time. It is of course useless to fight the inevitable, and the strongest will must bend and break before the crumbling touch of years. Whether it be good or bad, all cling to existence, and sadly and reluctantly let go the tendrils that hang to pulsating life. The fading of spring and youth, and the coming of autumn, with its suggestion of the dying year and the closing life, is most touching and beautiful. In looking at the relentlessness of fate, poor Omar could not but lament that she was inexorable and hard. He would have tempered her stern rigour with a little

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human love and tender pity, and bade the *Great Recorder* leave much untold. He recognised the great fact that the scheme could not be changed, and that even our brief existence depended on our subservience to the Great Will that would not bend or break; but still he regretted that it was not more tender and forgiving than it is:—

Would but some wingéd Angel ere too late
Arrest the yet unfolded Roll of Fate,
And make the stern Recorder otherwise
Enregister, or quite obliterate!

Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

It is impossible to live to a moderate age without forming some idea of the conduct of life. This may be practical or theoretical, or both. But, without consciousness, we construct some theory of life and its purpose, and our daily conduct conforms more or less closely to the theory we accept. The crude religionist of the old type says that hopes of future rewards and punishments must be kept constantly before the mind; or man would give himself completely to indulgence, and the race would die. This theory loses sight of the fact that Nature herself is constantly wiping out those who defy her laws, pre-

serving longest the ones who conform to the conditions she has imposed. Excesses of all kinds weaken and destroy life and bring the natural penalty which leaves only the more rational, and temperate to perpetuate life on earth. From Omar's view of life, he could not but have thought that it was the duty of every pilgrim to get the most he could in his journey through the world. But really all agree to this fundamental fact: the religionist says that man should be less happy here in order that his enjoyment may be greater in the world to come. It is not as to the theory concerning life's purpose that men have differed, but as to the conduct that really brings the greatest happiness, when the last balance is struck and the book of life closed.

Our poet could not see the days and years go by, and life's sand run out, and still postpone all enjoyment to some far off misty time. He believed in the reality of to-day, and that beyond the present all was a vision and a dream. In his day, as in ours, the priests held out the hope of a material heaven and the fear of a material hell to keep the wanderers in the narrow path; but Omar was a philosopher and an astronomer; and he peered into the depths of endless space and could only see whirling worlds like

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ours, and could find no place for a material heaven, nor for a material hell. What the mysteries of hell could not reveal, the theories of life left equally in the dark. While he refused to be moved by a literal heaven or hell, he yet felt a deep meaning attached to those old religious views. The humane thinkers of to-day have scarcely gone beyond this old seer, who lived centuries ago and pondered over the same theories over which our heated theologians are found to wrangle so often. The following stanza seems to be the last breath of ethical thought instead of the musty musings of an old recluse who has been dead these eight-hundred years!

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that After-life to spell:
And by and by my Soul return'd to me,
And answer'd—'I Myself am Heav'n and Hell'

And again:—

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire,
And Hell, the Shadow of a Soul on fire,
Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,
So late emerg'd from, shall so soon expire!

This simply means that the present fleeting moment is the only real one, and that we must do with it the best we can. For, not only is the present the important time, but realities know nothing but the present. There is no moment but the one that is here—

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the past is gone--the next one has not yet come, and he who misses the present loses all there is:—

Some for the Glories of This World ; and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come ;

Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum !

I must abjure the Balm of Life, I must,
Scared by some After-reckoning ta'en on trust,
Or lured with Hope of some Diviner Drink,
To fill the Cup—when crumbled into Dust.

As to how the pleasures are to be found, men never have agreed—and never can agree. For, our view of pleasure, like our feelings and emotions, grows out of the conditions of our being, and is the result of causes that we did not create and cannot contest. Some there are who look at all strife and suffering of the world and feel no kinship with the great mass that moves and feels and thinks. These walk silently along the path alone, oblivious alike of the pleasures and the sufferings of the world around. Others there are whose souls are so sensitive that they feel the joys and sorrows of the world as their own, and who cannot divide their lives and pleasures from the sentient moving creatures that teem and swarm upon the earth ! Both and all can and must feel these appetites and desires that are ever incident to life. Without these, Nature could never bring

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life on the earth, nor sustain it when it came. It is in the balancing of these feelings that Nature almost unnecessarily makes the imperfect man. Unless the motives and desires are sufficiently developed, the creature is cold, impassive, pulseless clay: and, on the other hand, too much developed, it runs the risk of sacrificing the higher emotions, and more lasting emotions, to the fleeting pleasures of the hour. Almost every person must stand upon one side or the other of this shadow-line which no man can see. Perhaps, the *Rubáyat* shows too great a leaning to the sensual—too great a fondness for the *Vine*. But we must remember that some of these allusions are no doubt meant to be symbolical—though it cannot be denied that Omar *was* fond of the grape and found its use one of the chief pleasures of life. Since, however, it is more than certain that our poet was a philosopher and a man of science, possessing insight and ability far beyond the age and the country he lived in, and that he was a man of such moderate worldly ambition as becomes a philosopher, and such modest wants as rarely satisfy a confirmed debauchee, I am disposed to believe that though Omar often partook of the Juice of the grape, he bragged more than he drank of it, in very defiance, perhaps, of the hypocritically religious who invariably filled him with disgust and abhorrence. Thus, if in

many places Omar's *Wine* simply means *Grape Juice*, in many other places it does not admit of such an interpretation.

It would seem that pure philosophy and theology could not satisfy Omar's mind—these presented only visionary and inconsistent theories of life, utterly barren and futile—wholly purposeless and wrong. After studying and wrangling and disputing about these, he threw them to the winds, and reached out for the realities—however transitory and short-lived these realities seemed to be. His exchange of theories and mysticisms for wine may be symbolical or not, but whether literal or figurative, he could hardly have been cheated by the trade—at least such was his conviction. This is the way he relates the story of this change of heart.

You know, my Friends, with what a brave Carouse
I made a Second Marriage in my house,
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse

After throwing theoretical philosophy to the winds, he turned to the *Vine* to learn what life really meant. No doubt the *Vine* that stands for *Wine* is here figuratively used. It might mean a wine cup, it might mean feeding a beggar—it might mean a cosy room and comfortable clothes. It is certain it means something besides the intangible barren theories, which have ever furnished theologians and professors

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of a certain class with the pleasing occupation of splitting hairs and quibbling about the meaning of terms.

Then to the Lip of this poor earthen Urn
I lean'd, the Secret of my Life to learn :
And Lip to Lip it murmured—"While you live,
Drink!—for, once dead, you never shall return"

Here again *Wine* has a far deeper meaning than mere grape-juice that muddles reason and mars the intellect. Using *Wine* in this higher sense, we must admit that it is only reasonable not to postpone the pleasures of the *Wine*. For, time is fleeting and every hour may be the last. Life has no space for empty resolutions or regrets: these only rob existence of the portion of the prizes that she stingily scatters into this ring to be fought and scrambled after by the crowd.

Perplexed no more with Human or Divine,
To-morrow's tangle to the winds resign,
And lose your fingers in the tresses of
The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine

This stanza may mean *Wine*—it may mean any strong purpose or intense emotion that takes possession of our entire being—that makes us its devoted slave anxious to dare and suffer for the privilege of enlisting in a cause.

That Omar knew something of life's pleasures and realities, besides the wine he

lauded, is apparent from his writings. His insight was so deep that he could not be deceived by the tinsel, and glitter, and trappings that make up the vain show with which men deceive others and attempt to beguile themselves. In Persia, 800 years ago, there were probably no seven or eight story buildings, no railroads and tram-ways, no telephones and telegraphs—perhaps no theatres and banks; but no doubt those old Mahomedans had much as vain and artificial and as perplexing as these inventions of a later day. There was then as now the master, or the mill-owner, with all the idleness that luxury could create in that land and time: there was also as to-day the hopeless slave, whose only purpose on earth was to minister to the reckless parasite and knave; and all these—master and man alike—were helpless prisoners in the schemes and devices, the machinery and inventions, the worthless appendages and appliances that bound and enslaved them, and which have an ever-increasing strength to-day. But Omar knew full well that all this was a delusion and a snare—that it failed of the purpose which it was meant to serve. He turned from these variety-shops and fancy-bazaars of a shallow civilization to a simpler and saner life, and found the most lasting pleasures closer to the heart of Nature, to whom

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man must ever turn from his devious wanderings, like the lost child that comes back to its mother's breast.

What simpler and higher happiness has all the artificial civilization of the world been able to create than what is expressed in the following :—

A Book of Verses underneath a Tree,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thee
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise to me!

It is these bright spots in life's desert that make us long to stay. These hours of friendship and close companionship of congenial souls are the only pleasures that are real. From these no regrets can come. Here in these restful spots, away from the glare and glamour of all artificial life, from the bustle and turmoil of the world, above its petty strifes and cruel taunts, in the quiet and trust of true comradeship, we forget the evil, and fall in love with life. And our old philosopher, with all his pessimism, with all his doubts and disappointments, knew that *here*, in sympathetic fellowship, was the greatest peace and happiness that mortal man could ever know. In the presence of the friends he loved, and with the comradeship of congenial lives, he could not but regret the

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march of time and the flight of years, which heralded the coming of the end.

Poor Omar was like all the rest of us who live—he looked forward into that dark unknown sea, and shuddered as he felt the rising waters on his feet! All of us know how small and worthless are our lives, when measured by the infinite bubbles poured out upon the sands of time. We know that we shall quickly sink into the dark sea and the waves will close above us, as if we had not been. And yet we do not really think of the world as moving on the same, when we have spoken our last lines and have retired behind the scenes. To the world we are little: to ourselves we are all. We almost hope that for a time at least we shall be missed, that some souls will sorrow and some lives will feel pain at our final separation. We hope that here and there some pilgrim will tell of a burden we helped him to bear, or a load we tried to smooth. That sometimes when the merry feast is on, a former friend will feel a momentary shadow rest upon his heart at the thought of the face he used to know or the voice that is now still! This is the greatest hope and the surest intuition of the “life after death,” for which all humanity instinctively long. Our souls hope and long for that higher immortality of individual consciousness, in which our

SUBLIME PESSIMISM.

highest and noblest selves shall realise the Supreme Presence, as we never can in this lower life. This immortality will come, if it is to come. No one can deprive us of it. In the meantime let us remember that after death "to live in the lives of those whom we love" is not death—but Life—and the Highest Life. It is within the reach of every one, however poor and humble he or she may be. This is the great lesson of all philosophy, all science and all religion. And yet how often it is forgotten! How often it is ignored through the perversity of human nature! It is this lesson that we need to carry with us and live up to in our active paths of life and secret moments of thought. And it needs to be done while the present moment lasts; for, who knows, whether the next is ours? Thus Omar Khayâm too mused, and hoped, and told in most pathetic strains:—

Yon rising Moon that looks for us again—
How oft hereafter will she wax and wane,
How oft hereafter rising look for us
Through this same Garden—and for *one* in vain!

And when like her, Oh Sâki, you shall pass
Among the Guests Star-scattered on the Grass,
And in your joyous errand reach the spot
Where I made One—turn down an empty Glass

TAMÂM.

